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United Arab Emirates

Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

Updated FAIRS Report for the UAE 2000

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Report Highlights:

This is an updated version of the first FAIRS report submitted for the UAE in 1998. There are few significant changes, but this report provides extensive information on food additives, colors and preservatives not previously mentioned.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Dubai [TC1], TC

**UNITED ARAB EMIRATES:
FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL IMPORT REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS (FAIRS)**

Dated: June 2000

Section(s) Updated: All

Disclaimer: This report has been prepared by the Agricultural Trade Office of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Dubai, UAE for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care has been taken in the preparation of this report, the information provided may not be completely accurate either because policies have changed since its preparation or clear and consistent information was not available. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters verify all import requirements with local authorities through their importers, before sales conditions are finalized and goods are shipped. **FINAL IMPORT APPROVAL OF ANY PRODUCT IS SUBJECT TO THE RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY THE COUNTRY OF IMPORT AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.**

Please contact this office, if you have any comments, corrections or suggestions about the material contained in this report. Our e-mail address is: atodubai@fas.usda.gov.

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A. FOOD LAW OVERVIEW

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Other members are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The GCC states are collectively working on harmonizing their food safety standards, including labeling and shelf-life standards. However, member countries still exert significant autonomy when it comes to the implementation of regional requirements. Many members selectively enforce GCC regulations and establish their own standards when they disagree with regional requirements.

In the UAE, food safety regulations are set by the General Secretariat of Municipalities (GSM), based on recommendations from its Technical Committee (TC). For the most part, local regulations are based on GCC standards, when available. The TC is comprised of food laboratory directors from the UAE municipalities and representatives from the office of the Secretary General of the GSM, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health and the Standard and Measurements Department of the Ministry of Finance and Industry.

The health department of each municipality is responsible for enforcing food safety standards. In general, each municipality or emirate has a food control division and a health laboratory for this purpose. While information is shared between municipalities, they operate independently. The municipalities of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah are the major entry points for imported food products.

Food products are regularly inspected at the time of import and at the point of sale. Fines are levied and products destroyed for severe violations. Imported and locally produced food products face the same food safety regulations and labeling requirements. There are no environmental laws regulating food product packaging at present.

The UAE is a growing market for high value food products. It is free trade oriented with few non-tariff trade barriers. Shelf-life standards that are not science-based, the need for production as well as expiry dates on most food products and the requirement that at least one-half a product's shelf-life be in effect before it can be cleared at the point of importation are the major regulatory barriers facing U.S. (and other) suppliers.

Because of changing regulations and the enforcement autonomy of member countries, exporters are strongly encouraged to work closely with their importers to obtain pre-export label and product clearance.

B. LABELING REQUIREMENTS

For the most part, the UAE enforces Gulf Standard (GS) 9/1995, regulating food labels. A major exception to this standard is that the UAE, so far, accepts English-only labels and does not require Arabic labeling on food products. Since this is an Arab country, however, and many products are re-exported to neighboring countries, suppliers are encouraged to provide bilingual labels (e.g. Arabic/English) or Arabic stickers containing crucial label information.

In general, a standard U.S. label meets most local labeling requirements. The production date requirement is a key difference. Under current UAE regulations, a food label must contain the following information:

- Product and brand names;
- Ingredients in descending order of proportion;
- Additives using their “E” numbers (group names are accepted, see appendix B.);
- The origin of all animal fats (must be of Halal origin);
- Net content in metric units;
- Production and expiry dates (see below for details);
- Country of origin;
- Manufacturer’s/exporter’s name and address;
- Special storage and preparation instructions, if any.

In general, products shipped in bulk and institutional-size containers must comply with all labeling regulations. For example, bulk cartons of fresh fruits and vegetables must contain most label information, but need not carry production/expiry dates.

Labels for specialty foods such as diet, health and baby foods must contain detailed information about the product's vitamin and mineral content, nutritive value per 100 grams and proper use and storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable and there are no RDA label requirements. In general, U.S. nutritional labeling is acceptable and may eventually be the basis for local nutritional labeling standards.

The importation and sale of pork and pork containing products is permitted, but strictly regulated. Labels for such products must comply with the general labeling requirements and clearly state that the product contains pork. No food labels can contain pictures of, nor recipes listing pork or alcohol.

Labels for pet foods must be printed in Arabic. Arabic/English labels are permitted, as are Arabic stickers in lieu of Arabic labels. The label must contain the statement, “Not fit for human consumption”. Production/expiry dates are required for pet foods.

The UAE enforces GS 150/1993, Part I, regulating shelf-life durations for approximately 90 food products. Under GS 150, production/expiry dates for selected products must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. These dates may not be printed on stickers. U.S. bar coding is not accepted in lieu of P/E dates and a label may not carry more than one set of P/E dates. P/E dates must be printed in the following fashion, depending upon the shelf-life of the product:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf-life of 6 months or less;
- Month/year for products with a shelf-life longer than 6 months.

Under the month/year format, the last day of the month is considered the expiry date. The month may be printed in numbers or letters. For example, both 3/00 and March 00 are acceptable formats.

The production date must be preceded by the word “Production” or the letter “P”. The expiry date must be preceded by one of the following statements: “Expiration (date)”; “Use by (date)”; “Use before (date)”; “Sell by (date)”; “Valid until (date) from the date of production”; or the

letter "E".

With few exceptions, a product must have at least one-half of its shelf-life remaining at the time of import. Frozen meat and poultry products must be imported within 4 months of their date of production, regardless of the length of their shelf-life.

The following products are specifically exempt from expiration dates: salt, white sugar, dry and dried legumes, dried vegetables, spices and other condiments, tea and rice.

Most of the major municipalities offer the following services to facilitate food product imports:

- Pre-shipment inspection of food labels: Copies of labels, can be sent (fax copies are acceptable) directly to inspection officials for review, free-of-charge. If approved, a notice will be issued to accompany the product and facilitate inspection at the time of arrival.

- Pre-shipment inspection of ingredients: For a fee of approximately \$55, officials will analyze a product to determine whether or not it complies with all ingredient requirements.

Occasionally, local health officials will permit the importation of food products with minor labeling infractions. Exemptions are granted on a one-time basis and the sale of such products usually is limited to institutional end users.

C. FOOD ADDITIVE REGULATIONS

The UAE has begun to enforce GS 23/1998, regulating the use of food coloring additives. In the absence of a GCC standard, the UAE recognizes international standards (e.g., Codex Alimentarius) or European standards. Currently, the UAE enforces a more extended list of food additives than those listed in the GS. Rarely is an illegal food additive or ingredient detected in U.S. origin products. Nevertheless, exporters are encouraged to work closely with their importers to ensure their products meet all UAE food additive requirements. UAE health authorities always warn importers/local producers that "The addition of food coloring, preservatives, antioxidants and non-nutritive sweeteners is restricted. The quantity used of each item is subject to specific limits. Food Control Sections must be contacted for further details".

D. PESTICIDE AND OTHER CONTAMINANTS

In general, in the absence of local standards the UAE recognizes Codex Alimentarius standards governing pesticide and other contaminate residue levels. Chemical contamination is a growing concern among UAE authorities and efforts are underway to update local guidelines and improve testing procedures. Food products meeting U.S. residue standards will most likely meet future UAE standards. It is very rare that U.S. origin products are rejected due to pesticide and other contaminant residues.

E. OTHER REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

All imported food products must be accompanied by a health certificate issued by the appropriate

government agency in the country of origin, attesting to the product's fitness for human consumption. In addition, all meat and poultry products must be accompanied by an Islamic (Halal) slaughter certificate issued by a UAE-approved Islamic center(s) in the country of origin. These and certain other import documents must be notarized by the Arab-American Chamber of Commerce and the UAE embassy/Consulate in the country of origin.

There are no special packaging or container size requirements for food products. A radiation-free certificate is required for food products from Europe and Asia. U.S. products are exempt from this requirement. The UAE does not allow the importation of irradiated food products.

There are no specific requirements for imported food samples. Samples for food shows and other promotional events are routinely exempt from local labeling and shelf-life requirements. Product samples must be clearly marked as samples and accompanied by a statement claiming that they are not for sale.

A commercial invoice legalization fee has been levied since 1998 on all products imported into the UAE. These fees can be paid at the UAE Embassy/Consulate in the country of origin or in the UAE upon the arrival of the products which will not be released unless the fees are paid. This fee is equivalent on average to about 1 percent of the value of the consignment.

F. OTHER SPECIFIC STANDARDS

Other than the labeling requirements noted above, there are no special standards for specialty food products such as baby, diet or health foods.

Inspection officials routinely check for salmonella in poultry products. A shipment will be rejected for import if salmonella is detected in more than 20 percent of tested samples.

Imports of alcoholic beverages are strictly controlled. Only a few local companies are licensed to import and sell alcoholic beverages. These products are exempt from local labeling requirements. The import of non-alcoholic beverages is permitted, but these products cannot contain more than 0.05 percent of alcohol by volume. These products are also exempt from local labeling requirements.

The sale of pork products is strictly regulated and confined to well-marked areas of supermarkets. Restaurants must clearly state on the menu which products contain pork. Only selected retail outlets and hotels are permitted to sell pork.

The UAE Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) is responsible for regulating the importation of live animals and plants.

G. COPYRIGHT OR TRADEMARK LAWS

The UAE has significantly tightened protection of trademarks and brand names. Registration of trade marks is not required but, protection may be limited unless a brand is officially registered. Trademark infringements are rare in the food sector.

Trademark registration is the responsibility of the Trademark Section, Ministry of Economy and Commerce. A foreign company may contact the ministry directly to register a product. To speed the process, however, it is recommended that a local law firm be hired.

Sole agency agreements for food brand names are no longer permitted in the UAE. This means that a local company can no longer register itself with the government as the exclusive importer/distributor of a specific brand. Agencies registered prior to June 1996, however, will continue to be recognized.

H. IMPORT PROCEDURE

The UAE boasts some of the most modern air and sea port facilities in the world. Food shipments usually are off loaded, cleared through customs and inspected by health officials within hours of arrival in any of the major ports. (Dubai ports are the primary entry points for most food products.)

Every food shipment is subject to visual inspection upon arrival to ensure compliance with labeling and shelf-life regulations. Shipments are also subject to random laboratory analysis. Exceptions are shipments of baby foods and edible oils which are sampled each time they are imported. A consignment selected for laboratory analysis is usually permitted to be stored under bond in a warehouse selected by the importer. Lab results are generally known within 7-10 days. New-to-market food products are subject to thorough laboratory analysis. If cleared, they are randomly sampled thereafter.

Products found unfit for human consumption must be destroyed. Otherwise, a condemned shipment can be destroyed or re-exported within 30 days, at the importers discretion. Products cleared for re-export usually cannot be shipped to another GCC country. Fines may also be imposed depending on the severity of the violation.

An importer may appeal a rejection to health officials in the municipality in which the product was rejected. A special committee within the municipality reviews each case. A final decision is usually announced within a few days to one week. The committee's decision is final.

In cases of minor infractions, a shipment may be allowed entry on a one-time basis for limited sale, for example to institutional end-users only. Major infractions, such as improper labeling of pork-containing products or tampering with P/E dates, are severely punished, particularly those discovered after import. Such products are automatically banned from import, usually for several months, and the brand name and importer are often reported in the press.

In sum, with the exception of shelf-life standards, production/expiry regulations for selected products and the one-half rule regarding product shelf-life at importation, UAE food safety requirements are based on international standards and do not appear to vary significantly from many U.S. standards.

I. APPENDIX A - MAJOR REGULATORY AGENCIES

Federal Government Contacts:

H. E. Jassim M. Darwish
Secretary General
General Secretariat of UAE Municipalities
P.O. Box 5665
Dubai, UAE
Tel: (9714) 223-7785; Fax: (9714)223-6136

Oversight of food safety technical
committee

Mr. Abdul Motti Al Halwani
Ministry of Finance and Industry
Standards and Specifications Department
P.O. Box 1565
Dubai, UAE
Tel: (9712) 672-6000; Fax: (9712) 677-9771

Standards and specification issues

Dr. Ali Arab
Director, Animal Wealth Department
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
P.O. Box 1509
Dubai, UAE
Tel: 9714/295-8161; Fax: 9714/223-2781

Live animal imports

Mr. Mohammed M. Abdalla
Head, Plant Quarantine Division
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
P.O. Box 1509
Dubai, UAE
Tel: 9714/266-2781; Fax: 9714/265-4787

Plant imports

Municipality Contacts: Recommend as first point of contact for food import requirements and pre-export certification of labels and ingredients.

Mr. Khalid M. Sharif
Head, Food Control Section
Dubai Municipality
P.O. Box 67
Dubai, UAE
Tel: 9714/206-4201; Fax: 9714/223-1905

Dr. Amin M. Yousuf
Director, Food and Environment
Control Center
Abu Dhabi Municipality
P.O. Box 3111

Abu Dhabi, UAE
Tel: 9712/672-5008; Fax: 9712/678-5961

Dr. Abdul K. Ahmed
Head, Central Food Control Lab
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Sharjah, UAE
Tel: 9716/552-4017; Fax: 9716/552-3612

U.S. Agricultural Trade Office Dubai Contact Information

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Home Page: <http://www.usembabu.gov.ae/atodubai.htm>

APPENDIX B - FOOD ADDITIVES LIST**COLORINGS**

E-NUMBER MG/KG B.W	DESCRIPTION	COLOR INDEX NUMBER	ADI
E 100	Curcumin	75300	
E 101	Riboflavin		
E 120	Cochineal	75470	
E 140	Chlorophyll	75810	
E 141	Copper Complexes of Chlorophyll		0-15
E 150	Caramel		
E 153	Vegetable Carbon		
E 160	Carotene (mixed) B-Carotene	75130 40800	
E 160b E 160c	Annatto, Bixin, Norbixin Paprica Oleoresin		0-0.065
E 160e	B-Apo-8 Carotenal	40820	0-5
E 161b E 161g	Lutein Canthaxanthin	40850	0-25
E 162	Beetroot red (Betanin) Saffron		
E 163	Anthacyrin		
E 171	Titanium Dioxide	77891	
E 172	Iron oxides	77489	
E 173	Aluminum	77000	
E 174	Silver	77820	
E 175	Gold	77480	
E 102	Tartrazine (yellow #5)	19140	0-7.5
E 104	Quinoline yellow (yellow #1)	47005	
E 110	Sunset yellow FCF (yellow #6)	15985	

E 122	Azorubine (Carmoisine)	14720	
E 124	Ponceau 4R (red 2)	16255	
E 127	Erythrosine (red 3)	45430	
E 128	Red 2G	18050	
E 129	Allura red (red 17)	16035	0-7.0
E 132	Indigo Carmine (Blue #2)	73015	0-5.0
E 133	Brilliant Blue FCF (Blue #1)	42090	
	Fast green FCF (green #3)	42053	0-12.5
E 151	Brilliant Black PN (Black #1)	28440	
E 155	Chocolate brown HT (Brown #3)	20285	

PRESERVATIVE E-NUMBER	NAME	ADI
E 200	Sorbic Acid	0-25
E 201	Sodium Sorbate	0-25
E 202	Potassium Sorbate	0-25
E 203	Calcium Sorbate	0-25
E 210	Benzoic Acid	0-5
E 211	Sodium Benzoate	0-5
E 212	Potassium Benzoate	0-5
E 213	Calcium Benzoate	0-5
E 214	Ethyl-P-Hydroxy Benzoate	0-10
E 215	Sodium Ethyl p-hydroxybenzoate	
E 216	Propyl-P-Hydroxy Benzoate	0-10
E 217	Sodium propyl p-hydroxybenzoate	
E 218	Methyl-P-Hydroxy Benzoate	0-10
E 219	Sodium methyl p-hydroxybenzoate	
E 220	Sulphur dioxide	0-0.7

E 221	Sodium Sulfite	0-0.7
E 222	Sodium Bisulphite	0-0.7
E 223	Sodium Meta Bisulphite	0-0.7
E 224	Potassium Meta Bisulphite	0-0.7
E 226	Calcium sulfite	0-0.7
E 227	Calcium Bisulphite	0-0.7
E 228	Potassium hydrogen sulphite	
E 230	Biphenyl, diphenyl	
E 231	Orthophenyl phenol	
E 232	Sodium orthophenyl phenol	
E 233	Thiabendazole	
E 234	Nisin	
E 235	Natamycin	
E 239	Hexamethylene tetramine	
E 249	Potassium Nitrate	0-0.2
E 250	Sodium Nitrite	0-0.2
E 251	Sodium nitrate	
E 252	Potassium Nitrate	0-5
E 260	Acetic Acid	Not limited
E 270	Lactic acid	
E 280	Propionic Acid	Not limited
E 281	Sodium Propionate	Not limited
E 282	Calcium Propionate	Not limited
E 283	Potassium Propionate	Not limited
E 284	Boric acid	
E 285	Sodium tetraborate (Borax)	
E 296	Malic acid	
E 300	Ascorbic acid	

E 330	Citric acid	
E 1105	Lysozyme	
ANTIOXIDANTS		
E 300	Ascorbic acid	
E 301	Sodium ascorbate	
E 302	Calcium ascorbate	
E 304	Ascorbyl Palmitate	0-1.25
E 306	Natural Tocopherol Mixture	0-2
E 307	-Tocopherol	0-2
E 308	-Tocopherol	0-2
E 309	-Tocopherol	0-2
E 310	Propyl Gallate (PG)	0-0.2
E 311	Octyl Gallate (OG)	0-0.2
E 312	Dodecyl Gallate (DG)	0-0.2
E 315	Isoascorbic acid (erythorbic acid)	
E 316	Sodium isoascorbate (Sodium erythorbate)	
E 320	Butylated Hydroxyanisole (BHA)	0-0.5
E 321	Butylated Hydroxy toluene (BHT) Tertiary butyl hydroquinone (TBHQ)	

NON-NUTRITIVE SWEETENERS

<u>E. No</u>	<u>Description</u>
E 420	Sorbitol
E 421	Mannitol
E 950	Acesulfame K
E 951	Aspartame
E 953	Isomalt
E 954	Saccharin and its sodium calcium & potassium salts
E 965	Maltitol
E 966	Lactitol

E 967

Xylitol

OTHER PERMITTED FOOD ADDITIVES

<u>E. No</u>	<u>Description</u>
E170	Calcium carbonate and bicarbonates
E260	Acetic acid
E261	Potassium acetate
E262	Sodium acetate and diacetates
E263	Calcium acetate
E270	Lactic acid
E290	Carbon dioxide
E296	Malic acid
E300	Ascorbic acid
E301	Sodium ascorbate
E302	Calcium ascorbate
E304	Fatty acid esters of ascorbic acid
E306	Tocopherol-rich extract
E307	Alpha-Tocopherol
E308	Gamma-tocopherol
E309	Delta-tocopherol
E322	Lecithins
E325	Sodium lactate
E326	Potassium lactate
E327	Calcium lactate
E330	Citric acid
E331	Sodium citrates
E332	Potassium citrates
E333	Calcium citrates
E334	Tartaric acid
<u>E. No.</u>	<u>Description</u>
E335	Sodium tartrates
E336	Potassium tartrates
E350	Sodium malates
E351	Potassium malate
E352	Calcium malates
E380	Tri-Ammonium citrate
E400	Alginic acid
E401	Sodium alginate
E402	Potassium alginate
E403	Ammonium alginate
E404	Calcium alginate
E406	Agar
E410	Locust Bean gum (carob gum)

E412	Guar gum (Guar flour)
E413	Tragacanth gum
E414	Acacia or Gum Arabic
E415	Xanthan gum
E422	Glycerol
E440	Pectins
E460	Cellulose
E461	Methyl cellulose
E463	Hydroxy propyl cellulose
E464	Hydroxy propyl methyl cellulose
E465	Ethyl methyl cellulose
E466	Carboxy methyl cellulose
E470a	Sodium, Potassium and Calcium salts or fatty acids
E460b	Magnesium salts of fatty acids
E471	Mono-and diglycerides of acids
E472a	Acetic acid esters of mono- and diglycerides of fatty acids
E472b	Lactic acid esters of mono-and diglycerides of fatty acids
E472c	Citric acid esters of mono- and diglycerides of fatty acids
E472d	Tartaric acid esters of mono- and diglycerides of fatty acids
E472e	Mono- and diacetyl tartaric esters of mono- and diglycerides of fatty acids
E472f	Mixed acetic/tartaric acid esters of mono- and diglycerides of fatty acids
E500	Sodium carbonates
E501	Potassium carbonates
E503	Ammonium carbonates
E504	Magnesium carbonates
E507	Hydrochloric acid
<u>E.No.</u>	<u>Description</u>
E508	Potassium chloride
E509	Calcium chloride
E511	Magnesium chloride
E513	Sulphuric acid
E514	Sodium sulphates
E515	Potassium sulphates
E516	Calcium sulphate
E518	Magnesium sulphate
E524	Sodium hydroxide
E525	Potassium hydroxide
E526	Calcium hydroxide
E527	Ammonium hydroxide
E528	Magnesium hydroxide
E529	Calcium oxide
E530	Magnesium oxide
E570	Fatty acids

E574	Gluconic acid
E575	Glucono-delta-lactone
E576	Sodium gluconate
E577	Potassium gluconate
E578	Calcium gluconate
E620	L-glutamic acid
E621	Mono sodium glutamate
E622	Mono potassium glutamate
E623	Calcium diglutamate
E624	Mono ammonium glutamate
E625	Magnesium diglutamate
E626	Guanylic acid
E627	Disodium guanylate
E640	Glycine and its sodium salt
E900	Dimethyl polysiloxane
E901	Bees wax
E902	Candelilla wax
E903	Carnauba wax
E904	Shellac
E912	Montan acid esters
E914	Oxidized polyethylene wax
E927b	Carbamide
E938	Argon*
E939	Helium*
E941	Nitrogen*
<u>E.No.</u>	<u>Description</u>
E942	Nitrous oxide*
E947	Hydrogen*
E948	Oxygen*

*May be used as packaging gases in foodstuffs except E942 Nitrous oxide in infant formula and weaning foods.

E1404	Oxidized starch
E1410	Monostarch phosphate
E1412	Distarch phosphate
E1413	Phosphated distarch phosphate
E1414	Acetylated distarch phosphate
E1420	Acetylated starch
E1422	Acetylated distarch adipate
E1440	Hydroxypropyl starch
E1442	Hydroxypropyl distarch phosphate
E1450	Starch sodium octenyl succinate
E1505	Triethyl citrate
E1518	Glyceryl triacetate (triacetin)

